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Hands on the street: The rise of creative placemaking and everyday tactics in Poughkeepsie, NY

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**HANDS ON THE STREET:
THE RISE OF CREATIVE PLACEMAKING AND EVERYDAY TACTICS
IN POUGHKEEPSIE, NY**

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April 25, 2016

Senior Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for a Bachelor of Arts in Urban Studies

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FOREWORD

A friend once called me to ask if I lived in “Poe-keep-sie” because he was considering an internship at the IBM corporation’s campus there and wanted to know more about the city. Of course I first responded by correcting his pronunciation before an interviewer had the awkward task of doing so, then I revealed that yes I indeed did live here. I had never been asked to describe Poughkeepsie before, and so with the month or so of experience I had on the subject, I began to deliver a Wikipedia-esque response, going on about its vicinity to New York City, its major institutions like Vassar College and the first Culinary Institute of America, and the Walkway over the Hudson, a pedestrian bridge crossing the Hudson River that attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors every year. “Other than that,” I said, “I don’t know, there isn’t much going on here.” Four years later, having become more acquainted with the city, I now know that, at least in terms of its urbanism, I could not have been more wrong.

Poughkeepsie, NY, the last stop on the Metro-North’s Hudson line out of New York city, holds a steady population of around 30,000. It is deindustrialized, it is suburbanized, and its downtown has suffered subsequently, despite periodic attempts at revitalization. Poughkeepsie, however, is also multiethnic. It is home to a large artist population and active community development organizations, and these ingredients over time have been slowly transforming the city and have led to the emergence of a new core spirit of urbanism. This spirit is creative, it is resourceful, it is becoming more collaborative, and it is in many ways a reflection of the many hopeful and devoted citizens that want to see their city succeed.

In telling the story of Poughkeepsie, of its past planning failures and its current issues, there is a growing network of actors, a force of change gaining momentum, that may point to a promising future ahead. This network has emerged to do the groundwork in order to keep the city on the track to improvement. It is operating within a landscape that has been shaped by various social and economic forces and under a set of circumstances that are the result of the city's past failures and have led to a state of austerity and carelessness in recent years. This retrenchment of municipal power and service, however, has left a gap that is being filled by this network of artists and community organizations that are increasingly becoming more aware of each other and working together to improve their neighborhood.

This essay will detail the conditions under which this network has emerged, how exactly it is filling this gap, and the extent to which it is doing it effectively for the purposes of measuring the efficacy of creative placemaking and of tactical everyday urbanism. As much of the work being done has an emphasis on arts and culture, I will consider Poughkeepsie within the framework of the creative cities discourse and analyze Poughkeepsie, its past, present, and projected future, through the lens of urban theorists like Richard Florida and with reference to the work of sociologist Sharon Zukin. I will also explore methodologies of remaking the urban that I find relevant to the processes at work in Poughkeepsie, such as creative placemaking, as laid out under the National Endowment for the Arts, tactical urbanism, as defined by new urbanists Mike Lydon and Anthony Garcia, and everyday urbanism. I will also consider the outcome of the strategies at play, in terms of power dynamics and the work being done to prevent potential harmful effects, as these strategies of placemaking have often been criticized for their role in gentrification.

CHAPTER I.

SETTING THE STAGE

Over the course of its history, Poughkeepsie has seen many ups and downs, leaving quite the palimpsest behind. The city, settled in the 17th century and located about eighty miles north of New York City, has experienced every powerful trend in the history of American urban development. The rise and fall of industry, the emergence of suburban sprawl, the effects of white flight, the need to accommodate the automobile, and the city's reactions to these forces have drastically shaped the urban landscape. There are, of course, other factors specific to Poughkeepsie that have led its transformation, and of these, the movement of IBM into the Hudson Valley region was one of the most significant. The corporation accounted for much of the city's growth and wealth during its heyday and was also the catalyst for the suburban sprawl that was so detrimental to the city's downtown around the mid 20th century.

Harvey Flad and Clyde Griffin, in their book, *Main Street to Mainframes*, a title that gets at the heart of this shift in landscape, emphasize the role of IBM, as central to the development of Poughkeepsie in the past century. IBM moved into the region in 1948 and began thriving during the mid 1960s with the success of its mainframe computers. The growing workforce began settling outside of the city boundaries in the emerging postwar suburbs and commercial development followed. Poughkeepsie had embraced their new company town status and had become somewhat dependent on its success.

While located outside of the city, IBM had become its anchor, a single source of mass employment and economic security. As an article explaining the company's relation to the city

put it, “their money fueled a vibrant retail sector” and other local companies “slipped into a comfortably monogamous relationships with their big benefactor.”¹ Many could have guessed that this wouldn’t last forever, and in 1993, the company took a significant loss and was, after years of gradually cutting jobs, forced to lay off thousands of its employees. The city took a devastating blow; unemployment reached 10.8% in 1993, up from 3% in 1990, and business foreclosures reached an all time high.²

It is important to note that during IBM’s major success period, the nature of planning and development was primarily top-down, and the decision makers were part of or involved with the city and state governments. This was a time of eminent domain, state-wide projects, and urban renewal: a time when bureaucratic organizations reigned. This period, the early to mid-twentieth century, known as the organizational age, has been described by theorist Richard Florida as a period characterized by “the dominance of large-scale and highly specialized bureaucratic organizations.”³ During this period, planning flowed smoothly, was well funded, and thus had a major impact on the landscape. In the case of Poughkeepsie, where residential and commercial development in the suburbs was drawing tax revenue away from the inner city, and annexation had failed, a number of urban renewal projects were carried out in order to revitalize the city. A few of these projects, such as the Main Mall and the Arterials, while popular ideas at the time, were constructed quickly and with little thought, and are now considered major failures by the public.

¹ Keith Hammonds, "The Town IBM Left Behind." *Bloomberg*, September 11, 1995, accessed March 1, 2016, <http://www.bloomberg.com/bw/stories/1995-09-10/the-town-ibm-left-behind>.

² *Ibid.*

³ Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (New York, NY: Basic, 2002), 22.

When I first began my research on Poughkeepsie, I sat down with a local resident and asked what, in his opinion, led to a depressed downtown. His response was to draw a quick sketchy map on a Crafted Kup napkin, from which I could make out the waterfront and Main Street. He then drew somewhat of a rectangular box around the street. The lines making up the rectangular shape, I recognized, were the East-West Arterial highways and Route 9. To relieve



the East-West arterial today

traffic congestion in the city, the existing Route 9 that ran North-South was widened in 1966, and two one-way, three-lane highways were constructed on either side of Main Street in 1979.⁴ These projects left Main Street to suffocate, as the new highways effectively blocked it off from the rest of the city, and it was now conveniently avoided. At a 2000 panel discussion, then mayor Colette Lafuente stated, "the city of Poughkeepsie was sacrificed to highways, which created a no man's land in between."⁵

⁴ Dutchess County Transportation Council et al., "City of Poughkeepsie Transportation Strategy: Setting City and Waterfront Redevelopment in Motion," August 1997, 6, <http://www.co.dutchess.ny.us/CountyGov/Departments/Planning/PLCityPokTransStrategy97.pdf>

⁵ Ali Berzon, "Panel Discusses Direction Development Should Take in Poughkeepsie," *Miscellany News*, November 17, 2000, 10.

This construction helped to make downtown irrelevant during a time of rapid suburbanization, and not only led to the destruction of hundreds of historic homes and the displacement of residents, but also caused the value of the remaining homes to deteriorate, as the neighborhood was now a speeding-car zone. The highways also functioned as physical barriers that divided the neighborhood socioeconomically. As an article in the *Miscellany News* from 1994 stated, “the lower-class is isolated on the north side of the arterial and the middle and upper classes are located on the south side of the arterial.”⁶ This planning decision, at a final cost of \$14 million, entailed the loss of \$600,000 in tax revenue and 178 historic homes, and radically depreciated the safety, walkability, and character of the neighborhood.⁷



view of a vacant residence along the East Arterial

⁶ Leora Rosenberg, "Panel Discusses Urban Revitalization," *Miscellany News*, April 22, 1994, 4.

⁷ Clyde Griffen and Harvey K. Flad, *Main Street to Mainframes: Landscape and Social Change in Poughkeepsie* (Albany, NY: Excelsior Editions, 2009), 211.

The construction of Main Mall, a pedestrian shopping center hoped to be the “turning point in the revitalization of downtown Poughkeepsie,” began in 1973.⁸ The project cost was \$3,200,000, all financed through federal funding. However, it was, according to one of the junior planners at the time, built “quickly and with little thought” because those in charge “viewed the whole thing as sort of a freebie from the federal government.”⁹ The goal was to bring shopping back to the center of Main Street — returning the area to its former commercial glory — but many underestimated the impact of the surrounding suburban area strip malls and large indoor shopping malls. With the “halfhearted attempt”¹⁰ by the project managers and the “perception of main mall as unsafe... especially in the city’s white middle-class suburbs,”¹¹ the project soon fell into a steady deterioration process.

During the heyday of planning, in the mid to late twentieth century, a time of eminent domain and large-scale planning, Poughkeepsie was “famously” the recipient of one of the highest amounts of federal funding per capita to be used toward projects of urban renewal.¹² With only 10% of this funding used for the Main Mall project, the rest was put toward demolition (of much of the city’s historic infrastructure) and rebuilding, as cities were being reimagined to embrace modern times, to fight back against their own impending obsolescence as suburbanization ensued, and most importantly to be rid of the slums or “urban blight” that many thought were plaguing cities.¹³ Poughkeepsie embraced the large sums of federal funding, funneled in through urban renewal programs like the Model Cities Program meant to fight the

⁸ Josh Srebnick, “The Failure of Main Mall,” *Left of Center*, December 1, 1989, 8.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Griffen and Flad, *Main Street to Mainframes*, 308.

¹¹ Ibid., 313.

¹² Ibid., 223.

¹³ Ibid.

“War on Poverty,” with sets of plans and new agencies and committees to help guide these plans, such as PURA (Poughkeepsie Urban Renewal Agency). These projects, however, only provide an understanding of the physical aspect of Poughkeepsie's present past.

Another very vital aspect to the understanding of this time period, largely intertwined with this physical development but an issue of its own, was the shift in the social geography of the region. Under IBM's reign the “nonwhite” population had grown 4% in 1950 to 26% in 1980, and the growth rate of primarily white, middle-class families in the suburbs had increased from a negative rate in 1950 to a 20% rate of growth in 1980.¹⁴ This evidence of “white flight” of middle- and upper-class residents to the suburbs, a national trend of the postwar period, only exacerbated the social and economic issues that had begun to arise. Along with this changing landscape, federally funded urban renewal projects often resulted in mass displacement and were guided by leaders who used discriminatory tactics to further divide the already segregated landscape. In fact, the area chosen under the Model Cities Program to become the “Model Neighborhood,” was home to 99% of the city's 10% black population,¹⁵ which is problematic considering that “[the city's economic leaders'] priority was revitalization of the central business district, not the needs of the poor,” and their plan for these target areas was “to remove older, deteriorating, and so cheaper housing to make way for new and generally more costly commercial and residential development.”¹⁶

As the demographics of Poughkeepsie continued to shift toward a more minority population, racial tensions were high, and these tensions often assumed forms of exclusion, as

¹⁴ Ibid., 209.

¹⁵ Ibid., 232.

¹⁶ Ibid., 233.

white citizens exercised their power to keep African American citizens out of their neighborhoods and their schools. In the late 1960s, residents of the outer town of Poughkeepsie, organized to create the Spackenkill school district as an alternative to Poughkeepsie High School. While this campaign, according to Flad and Griffin, “may have had some merit” due to the overcrowding and consequent lowering of standards within the city’s high school, it seemed to be a response to the recent in-migration of a large population of black residents from the American South.¹⁷ The state, while initially doubting the reasoning, “eventually went along” and construction of the school was completed in 1970.¹⁸

During the 1960s and 1970s, when federal funds were administered to the city for urban renewal projects and antipoverty programs, “city administrations, neighborhoods, and community activists vied with one another for access.”¹⁹ Access, however, was sometimes granted and denied by members of the city government who felt that certain people “did not belong” in certain neighborhoods.²⁰ The PHDC (People’s Housing Development Coordination), which dealt with housing under the Model Cities Agency, was made up of locals who not only aided residents with home ownership, but created opportunities for African Americans to own homes. The mayor of the city at the time, Arthur Weinberg, had opposed the organization’s efforts and successfully barred them from a contract renewal in 1976, claiming “convenience of the city,” after he had discovered their plan to rehabilitate an apartment development referred to as Apple Hill. This “convenience,” however, was based on the idea that “low-income persons,

¹⁷ Ibid., 203.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 229.

²⁰ Ibid., 235.

including blacks, were potential occupants,” as a meeting of the Seventh Ward was held to oppose this project.²¹

This sort of century-old inequality, once established, tends to become a perpetuated cycle. John Logan and Harvey Molotch, in their book *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place*, provide their understanding of place as socially constructed and commodified, thus attributing a greater degree of autonomy to the actors at work than others do in the discourse. They point out that within the United States, “the widespread acceptance of an impersonal, self-equilibrating market obscures the socialness of place,” and this socialness, or these “organizational determinants,” plays a significant role in the neoliberal process of city making.²² Poughkeepsie's actors of the twentieth century, who showed a “lack of readiness to deal with the social and economic problems resulting from an influx of mainly African American newcomers,” in many ways, set the stage for the city’s contemporary set of issues.²³

Poughkeepsie is a city suffering from a scarred physical and social landscape, economic decline, and municipal poverty and carelessness. The issue of a bleak downtown, the decrease in federal funding and increase in need for social services, and the downsizing of IBM and fall of many other local businesses have plunged the city into an austerity crisis that has demoted planning as a municipal priority. Talk of corruption and a felt lack of care from council members, as beloved parks and historic buildings are being sold to developers for extra cash, is another result of this crisis that is causing unrest among citizens.

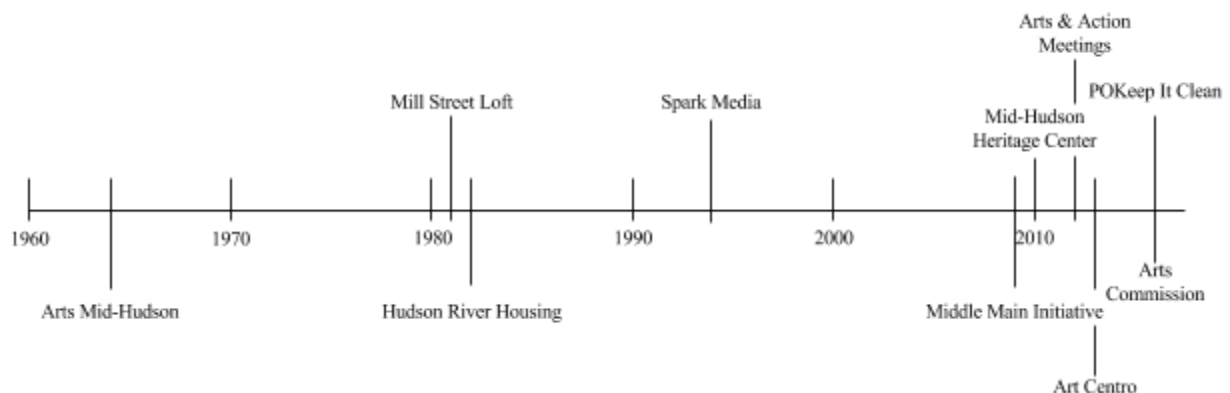
²¹ Ibid.

²² John R. Logan and Harvey L. Molotch, *Urban Fortunes: The Political Economy of Place* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 49.

²³ Griffen and Flad, *Main Street to Mainframes*, 233.

This situation, over recent years, has not only garnered social unrest, but social action. These conditions have paved the way for a diverse network of actors who push for positive change in any way that they can. This network is comprised of organizations, community leaders, artists, and others, each with their own motives, priorities, connections, and assets, that are working from the bottom up to turn the city around. For the most part, harboring common goals of “beautification” and of investment, they each have their own approach. They each have their own set of tactics to accomplish these goals, and they are each equipped with their own toolbelts.

The Network



timeline of the emergence of all institutions, initiatives, and other groups mentioned in this essay

ARTS & ACTION

“Excuse me, but could you tell me where the Arts & Action meeting is?”

The bartender looked as if this was a familiar question and pointed me in the direction of a pair of glass doors that I had never noticed before on Wednesday night trivia. I found many more people than I had expected, and there I was, ten minutes late and all at once feeling the gaze of thirty-some local artists as I walked inside. I took a seat at a long wooden table full of plates of pizza and glasses of wine and waited my turn in the rotation of introductions.

Listening to the announcements before me, I started to gauge the respective roles of everyone participating. Most of those who spoke were local artists advertising gallery openings, plays, poetry workshops, and community events like adult coloring (with adult grape juice of course). Some were there to voice ideas or initiatives for which they would like support, such as an art repository, and some were heads of community organizations there to keep everyone informed on what projects were underway and what events were coming up.

Most of the people around this table had obviously known each other for some time. Because of the comfort level in the room, I was able to get “the scoop” on all of the little things the group disliked in their city.

“Can we all agree that someone needs to paint that hideous parking garage at city hall? You know the one I’m talking about right? Can we give it a splash of color?”

“I hoped we could have a graffiti art event in the city, but it was, as expected, squashed by the mayor..”

At this point, a few comments followed about the “M.I.A.” mayor, and it became obvious that he had not exactly been favored by residents here.

It was finally my turn. I began by addressing the elephant in the room.

“So, I’m a Vassar student.”

An air of intrigue fell over the room. This was the first sign of many that Vassar students are somewhat absent from what lies behind the scenes in Poughkeepsie. I began explaining my reason for being present, that I was a senior studying urban studies interested in learning more about how things happen here. I then described my interest in movements like tactical urbanism and in public space interventions as the focus for my investigation.

Almost immediately hands shot up, notes were taken, and whispers began.

“Have you seen the parklets on Main Street? I think those were done in a sort of collaborative effort, maybe with kids?”

“I did some yarn bombing at Wheaton Park! Is that the kind of thing you’re interested in?”

“Have you heard of this group of Swedish artists that built a stage in Peekskill? It’s still there, and it’s just wonderful! I would love for something like that to happen in Poughkeepsie.”

At the end of the official meeting, everyone stood up from their seats and approached those with whom they were interested in speaking. I then met with members of Middle Main and the Mid-Hudson Heritage Center, a muralist with a studio on Main Street, an activist for public parks and historical landmarks, and a variety of other community members driven by creativity and community who wanted to reach out in support of my involvement. I was given contact

information and suggestions for whom I should get in touch with if I was interested in community development, which was quite a list.

The crowd was buzzing with energy, as people excitedly exchanged information, inquired about each other's work, and caught up with old friends. It became evident to me that there was a vast number of people involved in Poughkeepsie's art and culture scene actively working to preserve it and in turn to support any ongoing efforts to do so.

I once asked a local painter how many artists he believes are living and working just within the center of Poughkeepsie and was given the response, "Oh, hundreds." I was surprised by this statement, as I had never quite perceived Poughkeepsie as having a prominent artist community. It is this perception that many of the actors I met are trying to change.

I spoke with the founder of the weekly Arts & Action meeting, Linda Marston-Reid, to find out more about how these meetings started and how they have benefitted the community. Linda is the executive director of Arts Mid-Hudson, a re-granting organization dating back to 1964 that provides funding and technical assistance for events in the region. After she had moved to Poughkeepsie from New York city years ago, she said that she noticed that there was only one gallery here (The Mid-Hudson Heritage Center). She also noticed that those involved in the arts weren't talking to each other. Her response was to begin talking with people in the area and inviting them to come to a Wednesday night meeting, beginning in February of 2012. Over time, through word of mouth alone, attendance grew from a few, to twelve-twenty participants every week, and the list of those who have asked to receive weekly reminders for the meeting has grown to 300. These meetings have not only effectively established a network of support for those involved in the arts and in the community, but they also have a pretty impressive track

record, as Linda remarked, “We aren’t just hanging out and having drinks, we are actually coming up with plans, and we are realizing them.”

The list of art events that have come out of these meetings is growing every year. The first of these, Queen City Saturdays, debuted in the summer of 2013. The annual event hosts performances by local groups, artist vendors, tasting stations for downtown restaurants, and pop-up galleries that exhibit the work of many local artists. Soon after, the Queen City Arts’ self-guided art walk was promoted as a way to encourage people to get out into the Main Street area. On the subject of pop-up galleries, Linda described the process as “experimental” and noted the difficulty of getting people who regularly walk up and down the street to come inside, “We would talk to all the people that came in and ask ‘Are you an artist?’ Usually they would hesitantly say ‘Well, yes,’ and we would ask them if they would like to put art up there. Then, if they went to get their art, they would come back with their families as well.”

One concept that seems central to the group’s goals is creative placemaking. This movement is defined by the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency dedicated to supporting the arts through national support and funding, as “strategically shap[ing] the physical and social character of a neighborhood, town, city, or region around arts and cultural activities.”

²⁴ Many other organizations, too, have contributed to this image of a city alive with art and culture, such as the Mid-Hudson Heritage Center, a nonprofit aimed at enrichment and revitalization of Main Street through arts and cultural events. The Heritage Center, which opened in 2010, often functions as a gallery space, visible from the street, and the site of monthly community meetups. Art Centro, a space that rents private studios to artists and hosts community

²⁴ Anne Gadwa and Ann Markusen, *Creative Placemaking*, (Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts, 2010), 3.

art events, was opened in 2013 as a resource for the community. This growing presence of art spaces along Main Street certainly gives the impression that there is an active artist community, and to the delight of this community, arts and culture have become prominent buzzwords throughout community building efforts in the neighborhood.



mural and parklet along Main Street

CHAPTER II.

THE CREATIVE CITY

Upon observing the presence of creative placemaking and of a strong arts community as a vital part of Poughkeepsie's current action network, I will further examine the role of the artist and the role of arts and culture boosterism in terms of revitalization efforts and what this can mean for the future of an area.

Artists at Work

Poughkeepsie's artist community has attempted to take control of their city. These citizens are organizing themselves into action networks and promoting arts and culture as a means of growth and community strengthening. The Community Development Director of a local organization who has been working in the area for two and half years stated, "I've definitely seen an increase in collaboration and, really, organization, in terms of these revitalization efforts, and I think the arts community is one of the *strongest* groups." The members of this network want to see their city succeed, to see it become vibrant again, and to work toward a better image of the city — and they are making it clear that they are here to help.

The weekly Arts & Action meetings are one example of the ways in which they have mobilized to revitalize the community. These meetings provide a space for making valuable connections, and they are a platform for activism, as many of the participants use the time to discuss pressing issues for the city and to propose initiatives for which they seek support. This activism has also become more organized, collaborative, and political in recent years.

During the last election season, all of the mayoral candidates were invited to talk about their arts platform at one of the weekly meetings. According to Linda, this conversation was to ensure that whoever became mayor would “understand that the artists and people that live around here were very interested in making arts a permanent part of things — the tapestry of life here.” The social power of artists in Poughkeepsie, then, is a collective power capable of influencing who is in charge of the local government.

The influence doesn’t stop here, however, as the group has been working on the formation of an Arts Commission, a group of volunteers from the arts community who would function as a nonpolitical advice council for the city. This group has cited the sale of land and preservation of murals downtown as issues that they would be vocal on. This recognition of the arts, by local community organizations and by the city government, emphasizes the amount of power that the group has in their city and the important role that they play in revitalization.

In an interview with an artist involved in the formation of the Arts Commission, I asked what role he thought that art played in the urbanism of Poughkeepsie. He responded by saying, “there are many people around Poughkeepsie, myself included, that believe the arts can play a significant role in revitalization of a city. The arts can’t do it alone, but have been a proven catalyst in many other cities.” As with the idea of creative placemaking, the arts are assumed to possess a catalytic quality able to spark a revitalization process. This is done, according to the executive summary on the subject, by animating and rejuvenating public and private spaces, which may then improve local business viability and safety, ultimately creating a site that perpetuates inspiration.²⁵ A “creative locale,” referring to the site of such a transformation,

²⁵ Gadwa and Markusen, *Creative Placemaking*, 3.

should “foster entrepreneurs and cultural industries that generate jobs and income, spin off new products and services, and attract and retain unrelated businesses and skilled workers.”²⁶ As the city begins to embrace the rising role of the artist in their politics of citymaking, by adjusting to a more collaborative nature of change and by taking on buzzwords like “arts and culture,” what does this mean for the creative placemaking mission, and similarly, for those currently populating the Main Street area?

The Creative Class Formula

In *The Rise of the Creative Class*, economist and urban theorist Richard Florida describes the move toward the new economy, one based on the ability to innovate and with “human creativity as the defining feature of economic life.”²⁷ With the rise of creativity as an economic force, he estimates that “30% of all employed people” belong to the creative class.²⁸ This so-called class, however, is less of a class in the standard conception, as it encapsulates all members of society, regardless of income, that use creativity in a professional capacity.

Florida claims that a place’s ability to provide a creative climate, in order to attract a significant creative class, is a vital aspect to the success of the place. This desired creative climate, as Florida points out, is not due to the prospect of jobs as once thought, but it is instead a “quality of place,”²⁹ the idea of creating an ideal life in this new place. He describes cities that are seen as tolerant, diverse, and having “desired scenes”³⁰ (of music, art, etc.) as the primary

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, 21.

²⁸ Ibid., 8.

²⁹ Ibid., 232.

³⁰ Ibid., 224.

hotspots to which these creative class citizens flock, and it is this group of citizens that are then creating and attracting the growth of businesses. Under this thesis, strategies like creative placemaking seemingly have a promising economic advantage. By bolstering a creative climate and a prominent arts scene, cities may hope to attract these creative and innovative citizens that will lead them to success in the new economy.

His theory, though more often applied to big cities boasting innovation and full of those who work in the fields of science, technology, media, and other creative or innovative job markets, attempts to capture a few integral psychological and sociological explanations behind city making in relation to general human creativity. However, comparing this explanation with Molotch and Logan's discussion of cities as socially constructed commodities brings up the potential issue of "*whose* interests" are being served. Places, in their analysis, are products of the market, which cannot be imagined as an abstract force, but rather as "the result of cultures" and "bound up with human interests in wealth, power, and affection."³¹ Within this place market, or the site of "struggles over use and exchange goals,"³² they claim that "the most vulnerable participants... are those with the fewest alternatives."³³

With this in mind, does Florida's theory become a formula for gentrification? To what end is this means of creative construction place being carried out? If the goal is to increase economic development, which should then concurrently enhance use values, who will this new city serve? Will those most "vulnerable participants" have a place in this newly valuable

³¹ Logan and Molotch, *Urban Fortunes*, 9.

³² *Ibid.*, 2.

³³ *Ibid.*, 23.

product? These remain vital questions for Florida’s theory and for the rhetoric of creative placemaking.

Toward an Artful Revitalization

Poughkeepsie has come a long way from the company town city that IBM’s surge of success created, and the city’s physical landscape is beginning to show signs of its new focus on creativity. In efforts to promote art as the “tapestry of life” for downtown Poughkeepsie, the landscape of downtown Poughkeepsie has changed. The core of the city has moved on from its time as a commercial hub for the middle-class and has taken on a new quality, derived from its diversity, creative talent, and community involvement.



a mural promoting the Hispanic Heritage Committee's Youth Summer Program

A colorful series of murals, new and old, run along the walls of the abandoned brick storefronts, flags of Caribbean and Central American countries hang in the windows of the many restaurants and markets, works of sculpture stand illuminated on pedestals within the walls of a new makeshift art gallery, a small parklet with handcrafted benches and planters sits among the historic brick buildings, and an art school is currently applying for permission to produce a mural along the road in front of their building. These features speak to the spirit of Poughkeepsie and its urbanism, to the creativity and resourcefulness of its citizens, and to the promotion of arts and culture and embracing of diversity as a path to community strengthening.



Jamaican restaurant along Main Street

The emergence of organizations, programs, and resources for youth also ensure that these values are instilled early on. Spark Media, a project that began in 1994 as a way to mentor and educate children in the fields of media art and technology and to teach creative expression and critical thinking, has now grown into an award-winning and well-connected resource for Poughkeepsie. This organization gives kids who might not otherwise have the opportunity, to

undertake creative projects and to pursue creative professions. Nubian Directions also offers computer technology training to high school students and young adults, and also runs a garden project under the city's beautification initiative. The Mill Street Loft, a non-profit arts education center that has evolved over the past 35 years, provides opportunities and outreach programs for students, and is "committed to supporting personal growth, fostering self-expression, and enhancing human services through the arts."³⁴ Art Centro, yet another space of art education and community strengthening, offers private studio space and galleries, and often hosts sculpture and dance classes, drawing and painting lessons, workshops, meetings, and events like the winter Holiday Celebration and Community Clay Day.



view of the Mid-Hudson Heritage Center

³⁴ "About," Mill Street Loft, accessed April 23, 2016, <http://millstreetloft.org/about/>.

The presence of an active “bohemian” population, a term that Richard Florida uses to describe professional artists, writers, and performers — “whose US population has grown by over 375% between 1950 and 2000,” — is the driving force for this physical and institutional focus on art.³⁵ The fact that artwork is becoming more present in the urban environment, in offices, restaurants, in pop-up galleries, and on the exterior of vacant buildings, is a sign that there is a population that wants this. For those involved in the Arts & Action meetings, it is important that there is an active arts scene in the city, as one local painter voiced, “Arts and cultural events have the capability to bring people together, to educate, and to lift people up.” For the city of Poughkeepsie, or “a city in need,” he added, “I think that arts and culture are the best tools to lift the spirits of cities and neighborhoods.” For a city experiencing issues of safety, vacancies, and trash, the arts community believes that art may be a successful tool in the move toward revitalization.



view of Art Centro

³⁵ Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, 46.

Poughkeepsie's adoption of an Open Studios event last year, the collaboration of an artist whose studio sits in the middle of Main Street and a community development initiative, is an example of this tool at work. In speaking with one of the founders of the event, I learned that Open Studios, like so many other events that have been inaugurated in the last four years, was first brought up in the weekly Arts & Action meetings. The event, showcasing twenty local artists and counting, not only serves as a way to bring people together and to bring local art and culture into focus for the surrounding community, but also as a way to bring people into the streets of downtown who might normally avoid the area. The artist who spearheaded the event commented that "While Poughkeepsie has just as many artists as our neighboring cities and more arts organizations than all of the other cities combined, there seemed to be much reluctance to try one here" due to the problems facing the downtown area. However, artists and community organizations saw this event as a great opportunity for the same reasons that many showed it reluctance.



a mural along Main Street by Peruvian artist and Poughkeepsie resident Nestor Madalengoitia

Florida's assertion, implying that these populations that spur economic development gather in cities designed to fit their lifestyles and to allow creativity to flourish, disputes the claim that under the globalizing forces of technology and the vast networks that emerge that geography, or place, is dead. In fact, under this rhetoric of human creativity as capital, place is all the more important, and the perception of a city as place, as conducive to one's lifestyle, and perhaps even as having an "arts scene," is often the deciding factor when young entrepreneurs, artists, and app developers consider to which city they should move after graduation or in which city to start their next venture. The adoption of the Open Studios event not only works to activate public space, as per creative placemaking, but also publicizes an "arts scene," as per Florida. This event, as well as the many other art events and resources emerging, are feeding into the perception that Poughkeepsie *is* a city of art and culture, and that this is a city for artists and art lovers alike.

The way that urban theorists like Florida, Logan, and Molotch view the growth of a city is in many ways social. In accordance with Florida's thesis, attracting this creative "human capital,"³⁶ not through jobs but through quality of place, is the key to regional development in the new economy, an economy characterized by instability, short-term positions, and horizontal mobility. Places should then, evolve socially, toward a better lifestyle. According to Molotch and Logan, "the reality of place is always open, making its determination an inherently social process."³⁷ This "determination of place" as a social process speaks to Florida's idea of the creative class possessing the power to revolutionize a city, and the tendency of this group to put themselves in the center of the process of determination. The problematic possibility that this

³⁶ Ibid., 221.

³⁷ Logan and Molotch, *Urban Fortunes*, 47.

presents, however, as discussed previously, of urban appropriation and gentrification, is best summed up by Sharon Zukin in the concluding chapter of her most famous work. She says, “The meaning of ideas always changes when they are applied by different social groups.. Particularly as they are mediated by the market... The danger is that the realization of ideas in urban space re-creates an unequal distribution of the benefits that these ideas represent.”³⁸

Learning from Loft-Living

Sociologist Sharon Zukin in her 1982 book *Loft-Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change*, charts and critically examines the rise of the loft market, or the conversion of warehouse space into artist studios and then residential use, in the mid to late twentieth century in the SoHo district of New York. Her examination goes beyond the natural market force explanation and into the specific political, social, cultural, and economic forces of this time and place that brought on the phenomenon. As in many other American, formerly industrial cities, manufacturing buildings in SoHo found their place into an illegal real estate market as artists began converting them into live-in studios around the 1960s due to their spacious qualities and low rents. Before this period, they were primarily vacant or occupied by small working-class businesses owners. As the artist population in the district grew, the community mobilized to form the ATA (Artists’ Tenant Association) in order to change the zoning code laws to allow artists to legally reside in these loft spaces. The victory, brought on by the social power of these artists, however, had another dimension, as they were not the only group interested in the potential of these spaces.

³⁸ Sharon Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 190.

Zukin's critical stance on the conversion of loft space into residential use stems from her observation that this transformation became a capitalist venture driven by private developers and bolstered by the local and federal government. The idea to gain a "social and financial payoff" from this venture emerged as governments realized that the process could occur without loss in tax revenue or construction costs and believed that it could attract the middle-class back into the city.³⁹ It was when idea of loft-living caught on as "bourgeois chic" and became "institutionalized," she says, the "nature of the conversion process, as well as the character of the spaces that were converted, changed."⁴⁰ After years of state intervention, private interest, public media reports, and the declaration of SoHo as a "landmark district," eventually the market prices began to reach and even go beyond that of other apartments in the city, transforming the neighborhood yet again, and pushing much of the original artist population out.⁴¹

Zukin's study provides a useful insight on the revitalization of an area through the arts. While the ATA's victory at the time allowed artists to positively transform the area to their heart's desire, capitalist forces were at work to ensure that this transformation would not stop there. The process of conversion here was anything but natural; it was instead highly manufactured. The artists, in this case, were ushered in as a tool for the city, as she points out that an "arts infrastructure" was a factor for attracting the urban middle class and enhancing the values of properties and that "one of the more interesting types of real estate speculation in the city plays on the urban middle class's desire to be near cultural advantages."⁴²

³⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 2.

⁴¹ Ibid., 56.

⁴² Ibid., 20.

This period of residential conversion into higher market price homes is often seen as one of the earliest documented cases of gentrification, leading us to wonder whether this sort of revitalization can be sustainable for the original population in today's capitalist society. Can artists usher in a new era for a city without displacing residents, including themselves? These questions are important for those involved in the revitalization efforts of Poughkeepsie, as artists are beginning to become a driving force for the community.

Most of these artists, having lived and worked in the area for years, came from other places, many from New York City, and their decision to locate in downtown Poughkeepsie was in part due to its reasonable cost of living.⁴³ While this might invoke a bit of *deja vu*, can this case be different? Does the social power that the arts community has in Poughkeepsie, based on their notable role within the city's action network and their increasingly present hand in the city government, hold up against the forces that tend to unequally distribute the benefits of certain ideas of revitalization?

City and Identity

David Harvey, drawing on the work of French sociologist Henri Lefebvre, laid out the idea that the "right to the city" was more than an individual right, that it was a collective right, of power and identity:

"...the question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from the question of what kind of people we want to be... The right to the city is, therefore, far more than a right of individual access to the resources that the city embodies: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city more after our heart's desire."⁴⁴

⁴³ Linda Marston-Reid, 2016, personal communication.

⁴⁴ David Harvey, *Rebel cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*, (New York, NY: Verso), 2012, 4.

A right to the city is, in this definition, a collective right to the process of its urbanization, and in today's neoliberal capitalist spaces of production, this is becoming all the more important.

Poughkeepsie's art community, often mentioning the condition of Main Street as a starting point for the discussion and operating under the rhetoric of creative placemaking, has had a significant impact in the revitalization efforts of the downtown. Florida claims that many of the creative class citizens he has dedicated time to studying "express a desire to be involved in their communities." He goes on to explain that this urge is "not so much the result of a do-good mentality, but reflects their desire to both actively establish their own identity in places, and also to contribute to actively building places that reflect and validate that identity."⁴⁵ This desire drives those with the means to participate in the knitting of the urban fabric.

However, as we learn from works like *Loft-Living* and from case studies of cities like San Francisco, CA and Brooklyn, NY, an important aspect of identity creation in cities is exactly what groups' identity is being created, and subsequently what groups', then, may be appropriated or all together erased in the process. The inner city of Poughkeepsie is composed heavily of minority groups, with the black and hispanic populations together making up over 57% of the total 30,639 person population.⁴⁶ Many are also immigrants or children of immigrants, often from the Caribbean and Central America, and there is a significant population that does not speak English. The unemployment rate as of 2013 was estimated at 8.2%, and the median household income of this area is \$38,137, which is significantly lower than the New York state average of \$57,369.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, 230.

⁴⁶ "Poughkeepsie, NY," City-Data, accessed April 1, 2016, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Poughkeepsie-New-York.html>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.



view of Main Street

With these demographics in mind, how can Poughkeepsie make progress without harming its most vulnerable citizens? How can the movement of these creative citizens to positively transform the city also empower the disadvantaged and minority communities who may feel that their voice has not mattered in the past? And how can the arts and culture formula spur economic growth without leading to a process of gentrification and displacing the current residents?

History has shown, in the cases of top-down revitalization of a city, that these populations are in danger of being ignored, displaced, or otherwise damaged in the process. However, the nature of change in Poughkeepsie is no longer primarily top-down, but is also facilitated by street level NGOs and community leaders that emphasize inclusion and empowerment for all of Poughkeepsie's citizens. Organizations like Hudson River Housing, Middle Main, and so many

others are working side by side with the arts community to rebuild Poughkeepsie from the ground up, to address the needs of the most vulnerable, to provide opportunities to engage in arts and culture, and to provide open community forums through which their voice may be heard.

MIDDLE MAIN

“We’re preparing for our third annual Day of the Dead celebration in October, so here’s a flyer for that. You know, we actually have the second largest population of Oaxacans outside of Oaxaca, Mexico. Last year we had our sixth La Guelaguetza festival, a really popular festival in the Oaxacan culture. ”

Here is where I met Nora. Nora is in charge of community building and engagement at Middle Main, an initiative born out of the Hudson River Housing organization in 2009. Hudson River Housing, now a chartered member of Neighborworks America, began in 1982 as a way to alleviate homelessness in the city, and has since grown beyond that, to managing property, preventing foreclosures, and providing case management and support services. The Middle Main initiative, as described by Hudson River Housing’s Community Development Coordinator, Lindsay Duvall, began when the organization started looking into scaled, target neighborhood interventions:

“We started to look at some strategy to where we were choosing to invest in real estate, and there were a number of factors that led us to focus on Middle Main. One was that we had already developed some property in this area, some that we had owned but we were planning to develop in the future, and another factor was the foreclosure rate; there was a really high foreclosure rate for this target neighborhood. We also saw a real need here that wasn’t being met by the city or other agencies — kind of the lack of resources and the lack of support from the city in terms of basic services — so it was an area of high need (a lot of vacant buildings and things like that). So we decided to try some of this neighborhood revitalization on a very targeted scale to see if we really worked, more than just the real estate, but really engaging with the residents, building community, empowering them, supporting leadership development, in a very targeted neighborhood, if we could help have an impact and see that impact grow and expand throughout the city and the county.”

Since Middle Main's inception, it has collaborated regularly with the city, the county, the business community, the residents, and with the arts community on their mission to "create strong, vibrant, and creative community, or a 'neighborhood of choice.'" Lindsay further described the mission and process as "being based on the assets and resources of the neighborhood first."

Upon my meeting with Nora, my first introduction to the community development scene in Poughkeepsie, I was immediately greeted with maps, flyers, and pamphlets all containing information about Middle Main's many upcoming events, ongoing projects, and available services.

"Have you heard about the renovation of the Underwear Factory?"

This is one of Middle Main's biggest projects to date. A historic factory, abandoned since the 1980s and currently owned by the Mid-Hudson Heritage Center, is now planning to be retrofitted as a new community center complete with a shared-use kitchen, a center for women's work, and plenty of space for events and up-and-coming businesses. This is hoped to be a major center for community activity in the future, and should function as an "anchor project in Hudson River Housing's work to revitalize the Middle Main Street corridor."⁴⁸ This project, like many others in the area, is funded primarily by a collection of grants and donations, and it is one of the many examples of Middle Main's tendency to step to improve the downtown in ways that the city cannot.

The "vacant to vibrant" campaign, another project that I learned of later on from the more economically focused side of the office, is focused on the overall occupation of vacant

⁴⁸ "Redevelopment of the Poughkeepsie Underwear Factory," Middle Main, accessed February 15, 2016, <http://middlemain.com/underwearfactory>.

storefronts along Main Street. The campaign is working on ideas like pop-up shops to temporarily fill storefronts and increase commercial activity until more permanent changes may be made.

Middle Main's mission as described by members, is to empower individuals, to engage the community, and to revitalize the area that they feel has so much potential (spelled #Poughtential for the clever social media user). According to the initiative, the connection to the waterfront, to surrounding anchor institutions such as Vassar College, Marist, and the Culinary Institute, the incredible talent and ambition of local creatives, the flavor of the many ethnic restaurants, the vibrant arts and the strong sense of community fostered by the collaboration among local businesses and organizations all speak to this incredible potential. Nora went on to tell me about the partner institutions, a list of about sixteen, including nearby colleges, art studios, and community organizations that the initiative works with often. These offer anything from financial support to free advertisement opportunities to extra sets of hands when needed.

In terms of staying connected with the community, Middle Main has a heavy social media presence, including an active facebook page, a blog, and a newsletter. They also hold regular community meet ups on a range of topics. I was invited to attend these as well as their weekly Walking Club meet up, and this is where I uncovered the start of a meta-initiative, now going by the name *POKeep It Clean*.

As mentioned earlier, the rhetoric of creative placemaking is thriving in Poughkeepsie, and Middle Main is one of its strongest proponents. The area of Middle Main, an area peppered with ethnic restaurants and artists' studios, is a particularly prime spot for cultivating this sort of creative character, and the initiative is using this to their advantage. Though the goal of Middle

Main has not been spelled out in the words of this particular concept, their focus on promoting cultural events such as the *Dia de los Muertos* celebration and art events such as *Community Clay Day* follow the ideas of creative placemaking by appealing to their creative and diverse population to foster community.



mural designating the beginning of the Middle Main area

Though creative placemaking is a bit of a “fuzzy” concept according to Anne Gadwa Nicodemus, an urban planner and co-author of the report for The Mayors’ Institute on City Design under the National Endowment for the Arts, *Creative Placemaking*, it is often criticized for its ability to produce harmful by-products like gentrification, as mentioned earlier. In this case, however, it is being employed in a way that will hopefully ensure that the existing character and identity is not lost and that citizens have a stake in the upcoming revitalization efforts. When asked about the approach that the initiative has taken, Lindsay responded by saying that they prefer a “positive visionary perspective” focusing on the potential and the existing vibrancy, and trying to support and market that vibrancy “rather than focusing on the negatives.” In the process

of revitalization, then, an emphasis on the existing diversity of the city is at the core of its progress. Lindsay continued:

“We strive for this to be a very inclusive process where all members of the community here are stakeholders and no one is excluded based on their age, or race, or gender, or the language that they speak, and we really feel that if this work is to be sustainable, it needs to come from the residents and the people that are here now, and we want to ward off potential gentrification of this neighborhood as best we can.”

The work that these organizations are doing is inspiring, and has produced equally inspiring results. However, as this is just a snapshot in the greater process of projected revitalization, are the current power dynamics arranged in such a way that they have the clout to ward off these unfortunate by-products of increased place value?

POKEEP IT CLEAN

Residents of Poughkeepsie are involved, they're hopeful, and they're determined to restore their city to its former beauty. This hopefulness for restoration is making itself evident in the rhetoric of those involved in the city's action network, as they often list off their vast assets in order to substantiate their hope. While Poughkeepsie was once the "crowned jewel of the Hudson" and famously nicknamed Queen City, it has in recent years experienced a decline, characterized by a rise in abandoned buildings, crime, and overall disinvestment from businesses — all effects which ultimately perpetuate the cycle. A walk down Poughkeepsie's Main Street on any given day, a once thriving center of commerce and activity, is a clear indicator of the current state of Poughkeepsie's problems.

A walk down Main Street is exactly what one group of community leaders and residents do every Monday at 12pm. This walking club monitors the streets at ground-level, hoping to keep tabs on everything from what new businesses have opened up to what areas are becoming more problematic than others and why. One of the issues that these walks have revealed, a physical manifestation of some of the problems with the current state of things, such as a lack of care, of coordination, and of order among citizens and their government, is the presence of trash along Main Street.

Though this trash is obviously not the only or even the most pressing issue that the Main Street area is experiencing, cleaning it up would hopefully be a start for a larger trajectory of improvement and investment. At least this is the idea behind the *POKeep It Clean* initiative, a plan formed by a small group of local citizens hoping to address the issue of public trash.

I spoke to an active participant of the initiative, Jeff Aman, a local artist who also worked to start Open Studios this past summer, about its inception, and I asked what led to this sort of a citizen-led initiative focused on trash. He responded:

“The *POKeep It Clean* group is a collection of individuals around Poughkeepsie, all of which (as far as I recall) have participated in meetings of the Middle Main Initiative from time-to-time. The topics of trash, sanitary fears, and safety fears came up frequently over the past few years, coupled with the biggest fear that no business investor in their right mind would actually invest in the Main Street area given its existing condition. The previous City Government administration whined about needing more businesses and tax revenue, while at the same time doing nothing to provide a business-friendly environment. The tipping point for me was the winter of 2014/2015 when we had a long, cold period. Trash from the overflowing garbage cans and areas with no garbage cans was covering sidewalks and parts of Main Street, frozen to the pavement. There was no way to get rid of it other than waiting for a thaw, and there was nobody in City Hall that cared. Seeing the faces of residents and workers on the street during that time was very eye-opening for me, because it was apparent that the state of the sidewalks and streets had a huge impact on people, their mood and their self-image. I credit the Middle Main Initiative for kicking off *POKeep It Clean* because some of the participants had recently attended a community leadership training program that inspired people to take action.”

The plan for the group is quite straightforward: to do the research necessary to conduct a successful intervention, use resources such as in-kind donations and Neighborworks grants to begin their plan of action, and forge relationships within the community and with government officials that will lead to continued success. The group’s end goal is to improve the quality of public space in an effort towards beautification, investment, and civic pride. This intervention may be traced back to the dense network of arts and community action in the city, or in other words, it has come from the ground up due to the lack of efficiency at the top. Though this is certainly not a new phenomenon, it is perhaps interesting to look into this sort of citizen initiated public space reform in Poughkeepsie, being harnessed by groups like *POKeep It Clean*, Middle Main, and others in the network, in the context of new urbanist movements like tactical urbanism and everyday urbanism that have emerged under similar conditions.



view of Main Street

CHAPTER III.

FILLING THE GAP

The age of technocratic planning is over, and with the move toward a neoliberal restructuring of municipalities in cities across America, Poughkeepsie has taken on austerity measures that have resulted in, according to a member of Hudson River Housing, a “lack of resources and lack of support in terms of basic services.” With the absence of any specialized department of planning, and more severely the absence of these resources and services, an actor network has emerged to fill the gap. From the Arts & Action group, to Hudson River Housing and Middle Main, to ad hoc groups like POKeep it clean, those involved in the network are approaching the issues in Poughkeepsie in terms of their everyday experience and looking toward sustainable solutions to address them.

A Shift in Planning

The emergence of New Urbanism in the 1980s, after urban renewal had organized cities around the car rather than the pedestrian and had destroyed much of the historic urban fabric and disrupted communities, “was a beacon of progressive planning [for many].”⁴⁹ This movement, channeling the wisdom of Jane Jacobs, focused on bringing back the walkability, diversity, density, and quality of life of the older American city.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Mike Lydon and Anthony Garcia, *Tactical Urbanism: Short-Term Action for Long-Term Change*, (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2015), 67.

⁵⁰ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, (New York, NY: Random House, 1961).

Similarly, everyday urbanism, as Margaret Crawford puts it, emerged as a concept that “encapsulated a widespread but not yet fully articulated attitude toward urban design.”⁵¹ However, it is only seemingly universal in its understanding, not in its practice, and its contributors wish that it remain an “open work” or “umbrella term.”⁵² This concept traces the philosophical summations of the potential of the everyday, brought to life in the works of Henri Lefebvre, Guy Debord, and Michel de Certeau, and as a design approach, it prioritizes lived experience over physical form. The main idea behind this concept is to regain appreciation for the everyday life of a city and to reposition planning power “from the professional expert to the ordinary person.”⁵³

Another “urbanism” that has come into play here, sharing similar principles with those mentioned previously, is tactical urbanism. This relatively new movement gives a name to any sort of intervention in public space along a multi-leveled, broad spectrum that works toward more permanent change. The biggest spokesmen for the movement thus far, Mike Lydon and Anthony Garcia, who quite literally wrote the book on *Tactical Urbanism*, have highlighted its potential to catalyze long-term change in a way that stands to contrast the often long, drawn-out processes of traditional planning.

This sort of design thinking has been built on a legacy of new urbanism, of sociologies of the everyday, and on human ingenuity. It is in its own right, however, become a trend, just as the City Beautiful Movement and its debut at the World’s Columbian Exhibition in its day and age, and has succeeded in marketing an accessible planning strategy to the general public.

⁵¹ Margaret Crawford, “The Current State of Everyday Urbanism” in *Everyday Urbanism: Expanded*, ed. John Chase et al. (New York, NY: Monacelli Press, 2008), 12.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 9.

Its contributors claim that its popularity continues for four reasons: people moving back to the city, the Great Recession, which has forced people to do more with less, the rapid rise of the Internet, which has transferred power from institutions to individuals, and the growing disconnect between government and citizens.⁵⁴ These conditions, they argue, have led to the use of tactics that are site specific, low-cost, and low-risk in revitalizing public space. These interventions work to create a dialogue for change among residents, organizations, and key players in the city's government, and though these actions are short-term, they speak to more permanent change by exhibiting the potential of an area and by generating a more collective interest in social spaces.

The ideas of tactical and everyday urbanism seem to fit nicely alongside the discourse of creative placemaking, as they are all built on the idea of harnessing the existing character of a place in the pursuit of authentic improvement. They give the sense of a more palpable and inclusive change, a change with citizens as the central concern, and are therefore more likely to be taken on as strategies by community development organizations and other entities whose lack in technical design training is made up for by their willingness to grow and learn along the way.

Lydon and Garcia mention citizen's disconnect with their government as one source of the movement, and they blame "the layers of bureaucracy that must be navigated for projects small and large"⁵⁵ as a reason that these tactical urbanist interventions have caught on. The city government in Poughkeepsie has certainly been a cause for frustration in recent years, and has continued to concentrate its revitalization efforts toward, as one local phrased it, "the Poughkeepsie waterfront as the savior of the city while ignoring everything else."

⁵⁴ Lydon and Garcia, *Tactical Urbanism*, 63.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 83.

Organizations and initiatives formed to focus on the downtown within the past few decades have become a bridge between citizens and government, perhaps an extension of de Certeau's "tactics as the art of the weak," yet sponsored and funded by nationally run organizations and programs like Neighborworks America and Americorp Vista. Groups like Middle Main rely heavily on, as Crawford writes on everyday urbanism, an "understanding and acceptance of the life that takes place there."⁵⁶ This is clear in the explanation of their approach, which is according to Lindsay, a "very collaborative, participatory process where we, through surveying, through observation, through meetings, kind of assess what the needs and challenges are, and try to find ways to solve those using the assets that we know exist, so connecting the dots as best we can." While this initiative has focused more on events than design work, they have recruited an architectural firm that shares these values to take on a project within their target area.

This firm, called MASS design, and the owner of the property that is to be reimaged under the project are "working with a number of different not-for-profit groups to create a multi-organization, multi-cultural center there."⁵⁷ The project hopes to transform a historic trolley barn into an arts and culture campus, bringing awareness to the presence of Art Centro and the Heritage Center as community resources and hopefully strengthening their cause. Those involved held a community meet up at "level 0" of the project as a way of engaging residents and

⁵⁶ Margaret Crawford, "Introduction" in *Everyday Urbanism: Expanded*, ed. John Chase et al. (New York, NY: Monacelli Press, 2008), 7.

⁵⁷ Anthony P. Musso, "City's Trolley Barn to Get New Life as Art Center," *Poughkeepsie Journal*, November 10, 2015, accessed February 2, 2016, <http://www.poughkeepsiejournal.com/story/news/local/2015/11/10/dateline-local-history-trolley-barn/75531486/>.

learning what the community wants out of this project in terms of community public space, and as a way to ensure that the project would have a sustainable future in its location.

Other smaller scale projects that harness the same principles have also been taken on by various groups, such as the parklets along Main Street that are now used for community events. The pop-up galleries started by members of the arts community also fall under this narrative, as well as the pop-up shop proposal being worked on by Middle Main.



a community clean up taking place in a parklet along Main Street

There is no clear path to revitalization, but what is clear is that cities like Poughkeepsie can no longer afford to take on hail mary pass projects like the Main Mall. The city has given up on this sort of planning, and consequently, the ideas of everyday and tactical urbanism and the mission of creative placemaking have flourished under the network of actors that have risen to the challenge. The retrenchment of municipal services in Poughkeepsie, then, may be seen as both a curse and a blessing. On one hand, the city's austerity crisis has meant cutting the budgets

and staff of the police force and Department of Public Works, things that are harder to fix through tactics (though groups are trying); on the other hand, it has allowed for a network with principles of “advocacy, collaboration, and action”⁵⁸ to work from the ground up toward a revitalization that is representative of “the people that are here now.”

Conclusion

With all of the efforts toward creating a better quality of life, however, it is important to harken back to the lessons of past creative revitalizations and to view the conditions spelled out in this essay as only a moment, or a snapshot, of a larger process. Though improvement seems organic and inclusive now, what does the future look like for an artfully and culturally revitalized city operating under a capitalist system? Do Poughkeepsie’s current citizens have enough of a stake in their city to see the benefits of its improvement through?

While these everyday tactics are best for achieving viable results, they are also inherently temporal, and therefore leave room for uncertainty. While creative placemaking is a great way to harness the creativity and authenticity of a place in its path to improvement, it is also this new “authentic” quality and “arts scene” that have been factors for attracting new populations who cause property values to rise beyond the means of original working-class citizens, and in examining this moment, it is important to keep this larger narrative in mind. While keeping this in mind, however, it is also extremely important to acknowledge the very real and positive effects that the actions of this network have wrought.

⁵⁸ Middle Main, accessed February 15, 2016, <http://middlemain.com>.

While the municipality of Poughkeepsie is recovering from its present pasts, and struggling to do so under budget cuts and the inability to attract investment, which have led to the retrenchment of many basic services, a variety of actors, including organizations, social groups, and others, have taken on the task of revitalization from a street-level perspective. Many have formed organically and experimentally, in order to focus on the immediate issues that they have noticed while living and working downtown, and they go about addressing these issues in the same fashion.

This sort of action — tactical, communal, and art-focused — under this sort of discourse, with an emphasis on art and culture, diversity, and community, is the new standard of planning in Poughkeepsie. This network, and its recent momentum, has given structure to the ideas of creative placemaking and has allowed for a more tactical, everyday approach to city-making that feels inclusive and sustainable. Talk of the future of Poughkeepsie has emerged with force at street level, with conversations taking place at public forums, at monthly community meetups, and at weekly arts and action meetings, and the results are powerful. Though Common Council meetings stand as a municipal platform for voicing public concern, these are the meetings where change seems possible, and these are the meetings that produce some of the most viable results.

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